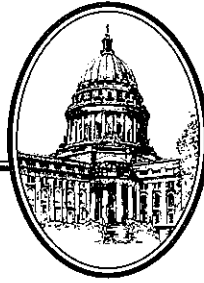


November 12, 2009



Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Audit
Committee on Financial Institutions
Committee on Jobs, the Economy & Small Business

Assembly Committee on Agriculture

Assembly Bill 575

Representative Peter Barca

Chairwoman Vruwink and members of the Assembly Committee on Agriculture, thank you for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 575, which will require the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection to establish standards for products sold as honey and prohibit labeling a product as honey if it does not meet the DATCP standard.

I was first approached on this issue by a constituent, Tim Fulton, who is the President of the Wisconsin Honey Producers Association. Mr. Fulton expressed the concerns of honey producers across the state that there is currently no standard at either the federal or state levels to regulate honey. This has led to countless instances of the sale of adulterated, and in some cases possibly contaminated, honey products being sold in our state.

Increasingly, products are marketed as honey that contain only trace amounts of actual honey or in some cases, no honey at all. Frequently the honey is cut with other substances such as corn syrup, which is inexpensive to produce. Because there is not a federal or state standard or sufficient labeling restrictions, customers often buy adulterated honey without realizing that the product they are purchasing actually contains little or no honey.

Likewise, it is becoming more and more difficult for Wisconsin honey producers to compete with foreign manufactures that can market an inferior product as honey and sell it for a lower price on the shelf right next to real honey.

To address these concerns, Assembly Bill 575 calls for DATCP to create a standard for honey in Wisconsin based on the Codex Alimentarius of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Health Organization, and prohibits selling products as honey that fail to meet that standard. It also creates a "Wisconsin certified honey" certification and a mechanism for testing products to determine if they meet the standard.

This legislation is part of a national initiative by those in the honey industry to institute standards for what is honey and what is not with the hopes of encouraging the United States Department of Agriculture to develop a nation-wide honey standard as they have with other products. However, until the USDA takes action to regulate honey, it is important for our state to take the lead to ensure the integrity of the product.

With this legislation, my goal is to preserve honey as a natural product and remove "funny honey" from our shelves to protect local honey-producing small businesses.

Thank you for your time today and I would appreciate your support when Assembly Bill 575 comes for a vote before this committee.